

Viewpoint: Pakistan's Last Chance

by Zachary S. Davis

Strategic Insights is a quarterly electronic journal produced by the Center for Contemporary Conflict at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. The views expressed here are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of NPS, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

Introduction

Next to the global economic meltdown, the implosion of Pakistan tops the list of urgent problems demanding immediate attention. A new strategy for Pakistan is long overdue in light of the continued expansion of terrorism and nuclear weapons production in a country on *Foreign Policy* magazine's top-ten list of most likely failed states. Pakistan is a "perfect storm" that cannot be ignored. The current policy is failing, but the tools are in place for the Obama administration to help Pakistan save itself.

A nuclear armed Pakistan unable to contain al Qaeda and those who share its objectives poses an unacceptable threat. Yet militant extremism is spreading from the Pakistan-Afghan border to Pakistan's major cities. The terrorist's immediate target is Pakistan's fragile democratic government, but their ambitions are global and threaten everyone who does not accept their noxious ideology. Bin Laden, Zawahiri and their Taliban partners are resurgent in Pakistan. Predictably, efforts by Pakistan's government to negotiate peace deals with the extremists enabled the Taliban to consolidate their positions and prepare new attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghanistan itself is a mess, with opium production that fuels drug addiction and terrorism around the world reaching new highs and the Karzai government barely able to control its own capitol of Kabul. While it might be tempting to turn our backs on this hornets nest, we do so at our peril. Pakistan needs help to save itself—and the world—from militant Islamic extremism, and the Global War on Terror is not the answer.

The new plan must defeat the destructive trends emanating from Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)—the remote and long neglected region on the Pak-Afghan border where al Qaeda has established a beachhead. Decades of neglect and underdevelopment provide fertile ground for exploitation of local Pashtun tribes, who accommodate Islamic terrorists and gangsters for cash and the rough frontier justice they offer. Memories of the mujahadeen's heroic efforts fighting side-by-side with U.S. and Pakistani intelligence operatives to defeat the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan have been replaced by images of guns, drugs, Islamic terrorism, bloody warlords, and extreme violence. The Pashtuns, Pakistan, and the world need a better future.

The new plan would initiate the next phase of the global war on terrorism under a more unifying banner such as the global alliance for peace and progress. We would shift the predominantly military focus of our counter terrorism efforts to encompass the full range of economic and political tools necessary to change the direction of this troubled territory. However, before soft power can take hold, hard power must prevail in the form of a deadly military campaign to remove the hard core terrorists who have insinuated themselves into the FATA. The Petraeus

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE DEC 2008		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Viewpoint: Pakistan's Last Chance				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School,Center for Contemporary Conflict,1 University Circle,Monterey,CA,93943				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 3	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

counterinsurgency strategy which has proven successful in Iraq provides many insights for separating al Qaeda true believers and their ilk from the indigenous peoples of the FATA. Any serious counterinsurgency strategy depends on timely actionable intelligence that distinguishes true terrorists from devout but potentially peaceful Taliban, tribal leaders looking for the best deal, and miscreants exploiting the situation. For this, there is no alternative to close cooperation with Pakistan's notorious Inter Service Intelligence Directorate.

The Pakistan Army is our partner in this enterprise, worthy of continued support. The embattled Frontier Corps is a reliable fighting force possessing special abilities with respect to local conditions in FATA, from which they are recruited. Building Pakistan's counterinsurgency capacity with U.S. weapons, training, surveillance, and intelligence support can significantly improve their effectiveness. Victory is possible. However, U.S. helicopters and night vision goggles are not enough if Pakistan's leaders do not have the will to defend their territory from the growing threat of militant Islam. Increased U.S. and international military assistance is warranted, but only in connection with *public* commitments from Pakistan's elected leaders to finish the job. President Zadari should declare his support for the Pakistan Army's counterinsurgency operations and endorse cross border operations by U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan's leaders must resist the temptation to seek political advantage through anti-U.S. rhetoric.

When the terrorists are defeated, Pakistan's army will take the lead in maintaining order and providing security for critical development projects. The establishment of political and legal systems that are seen as legitimate in the eyes of tribal leaders would enable the government of Pakistan to take the next steps in the process started after 9-11, of establishing its authority in the tribal areas. This process must succeed or Pakistan could see its entire nation fall under the influence of the al Qaeda-Taliban juggernaut.

The military defeat of terrorists would constitute 20 percent of the new plan. The largest element, at least 60 percent, will require economic aid to follow quickly on the heels of military success. Failure to follow military operations with timely economic opportunity would invite a replay of mistakes made in Iraq. The current U.S. aid package is a good start, especially if it is coordinated with the billions pledged by G-8 nations and the additional aid package before the Congress. The construction of roads, hospitals, and schools is the best antidote to violent extremism, but aid projects and workers must be protected from attacks by those who do not want them to succeed.

One approach that offers good prospects for early success would be to focus our combined military and economic resources on a limited area such as the Khyber region in FATA, which also sits astride the main highway that is critical for economic activity and is a main supply route for U.S. forces fighting in Afghanistan. A win in Khyber could provide a showcase for the alternative to violent extremism, which then could expand to neighboring Orakzai and Kurram Agencies before tackling more troublesome hotbeds.

The final 20 percent of this 20-60-20 strategy consists of the political and diplomatic actions necessary to rebuild an international coalition against the spread of violent Islamic extremism. The new administration must persuade NATO countries to redouble their efforts in Afghanistan, both in terms of following the leadership of Canada (yes, Canada) in providing the necessary fighting forces to defeat Taliban strongholds as well as economic and reconstruction assistance to give Kabul another chance at governance. Countries such as India, China, and the Gulf states have a huge stake in the success of these efforts, and should provide assistance commensurate with their interests. India should overcome its understandable anger over cross-border terrorism to support efforts by the government of Pakistan to establish its legitimacy and authority.

In the end, Pakistan must choose its own destiny. While mainstream Pakistanis still subscribe to their founding principle of becoming a leader among moderate Islamic states on good terms with the West, its political leaders have yet to secure that path. Political infighting and corruption threatens to waste what could be Pakistan's last chance to avoid becoming a failed state—one

that poses a multitude of dangers that cannot be ignored. If Pakistan does not stop the extremist insurgency, those who are threatened by al Qaeda will have no choice but to expand unilateral actions to prevent another 9-11 emanating from the FATA.

President Obama should hit the ground running with the 20-60-20 package: a renewed and focused counterinsurgency partnership to fight terrorists in Pakistan; a rapid action aid package to create economic opportunity in a specific part of the FATA; a diplomatic initiative to rebuild the post 9-11 coalition formed to eliminate al Qaeda's safe haven in Afghanistan. It will then be up to Pakistan's political leaders to take their country in a new direction, or cope with the disastrous consequences.

About the Author

Zachary Davis is a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif. His views do not represent positions of the Navy, the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

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